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DEVELOPMENTAL GROUP COUNSELING.

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DESCRIPTORS- *ELEMENTARY SCHOOL COUNSELING, *GROUP COUNSELING, PROBLEM SOLVING, *DEVELOPMENTAL PROGRAMS, *INTERACTION, SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT,

THE AUTHOR BELIEVES THAT GROUP COUNSELING PROVIDES A UNIQUE METHODOLOGY AND A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY FOR SOCIAL LEARNING. A GUIDE TO THIS APPROACH IS PRESENTED. DEVELOPMENTAL GROUP COUNSELING IS SEEN AS PART OF THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS. THIS APPROACH HELPS CHILDREN FACE CHANGES AS THEY OCCUR WITHIN THE CHILD AND THE WORLD. EMPHASIS IS PLACED UPON HELPING THE CHILD ARRIVE AT SOME NEW METHODS OF PROBLEM-SOLVING IN THE PERSONAL-SOCIAL AREA. THIS INVOLVES THE EXAMINATION, EXPLORATION, AND IDENTIFICATION OF THE CHILD'S APPROACH TO LIFE TASKS. THE FOCUS IS ON ISSUES AND CONCERNS IMPORTANT TO THE COUNSELEE. DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS WOULD PROVIDE BOTH LONG AND SHORT RANGE GOALS FOR THE COUNSELING PROCESS. THE OBJECTIVES OF GROUP COUNSELING ARE SPELLED OUT. THE RATIONALE FOR THE GROUP PROCESS STEMS FROM A RECOGNITION THAT MOST PROBLEMS ARE PRIMARILY SOCIAL OR INTERPERSONAL. SOME OF THE MECHANISMS WHICH CAN BRING ABOUT EMOTIONAL PERSONAL-SOCIAL GROWTH ARE DESCRIBED. THE ORGANIZATION OF DEVELOPMENTAL GROUPS IS DISCUSSED. THE AUTHOR HOPES THAT THIS PAPER WILL ENCOURAGE ELEMENTARY COUNSELORS TO CONSIDER A PROCEDURE WHICH MAY HELP THEM REACH GREATER NUMBERS OF CHILDREN MORE EFFECTIVELY. (IM)

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Developmental Group Counseling

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School guidance services have long been identified with vocational counseling, college selection, and adjustment counseling. Elementary school guidance must change its image from that of an adjuctive, corrective, remedial, or informational service. If elementary school guidance is to have any relevance for the educational process, it must find methods which facilitate and personalize the educational process. If it takes on this function it will not be concerned primarily with crisis oriented problems, but instead, with the developmental needs, tasks, and concerns of all children.

The need for new models

It is imperative that elementary school guidance seek new models for providing developmental services to all children. Some of the guidance procedures previously used in the secondary school are not immediately and directly transferable to elementary school guidance. Group counseling, however, is a procedure which holds particular promise for the elementary school counselor.

With the expansion of knowledge the elementary school teacher has increasingly placed an emphasis on development of cognitive competency. In some instances this results in reduced attention to personal, social, and emotional development.

The child should have available a professionally trained counselor who supplements the teachers' work and assists the child to cope with the developmental tasks of life. Teacher and counselor collaborate by providing services that individualize education and make it truly developmental in nature. The counselor provides a non-evaluative relationship and the setting for personal and social growth.

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Developmental group counseling and education are one process

Developmental group counseling, as I conceive of it, is part of the educational process. It provides the opportunity for each student to engage in an interpersonal process through which he works within a peer group to explore his feelings, attitudes, values, and problems, to the end that he is better able to deal with developmental problems.

Developmental group counseling places an emphasis upon a key word that must be associated with developmental guidance -- accessibility. The claim is not that each child needs counseling, but that the system should be designed so each child has access to a counselor if he has need. It is my belief that group developmental counseling can meet this type of need and make developmental guidance a reality, not merely a slogan.

Purpose: Maximum freedom and effectiveness

This developmental approach is concerned with helping children face changes as they occur within themselves and the world in which they live. The purpose is to maximize responsible freedom and effectiveness. This type of group work is predicated upon a conception of the counselor as a liberator who helps the child answer questions such as: What do I believe? Why do I feel this way? What do I value? For what purpose do I choose to function in this manner?

Kinds of children focused on

The type of counseling we are discussing would deal with individuals who are within the normal range of adjustment. Their concerns would be common to people at their age level. Their concerns might relate to learning an appropriate masculine or feminine role. At other times they might be anxious in regard to feelings about self, feelings of belonging, being accepted, nervous, or other common problems. Frequently groups of children discuss better ways of getting along with peers, and making

friends. At other times the group session may be devoted to school problems and feelings of adequacy related to one's physical or intellectual skills. The point is that we are not necessarily dealing with disturbed individuals, but instead are working with children who have concerns and the need for an opportunity to share them and arrive at some new methods of problem solving in the personal-social area.

The Developmental Tasks in School Counseling

Developmental counseling assumes that human development requires a balance between the need of the individual to grow in a self-actualizing manner and external or societal forces. The service we are suggesting is similar to that alluded to by Byrne when he indicated that the counselor might perform a basic counseling function through providing a developmental checkup. "It is through this examination interview that adequate development is reinforced and incipient developmental problems are found and worked on" (Byrne, 1963a). This approach involves examination, exploration, and identification of the child's approach to the life tasks. The focus is always on issues and concerns of importance to the counselee, and the purpose is to help develop positive attitudes which serve as a basis for the development of competence.

This guidance procedure would perhaps provide us with the opportunity to assist the child to both encounter and learn from discontinuity (Tiedeman and Field, 1962). Guidance then would help children to establish purposes and goals and think in terms of choice.

Developmental tasks confronting children

Developmental tasks thus would provide both long and short range goals for the counseling process. It is assumed from experiences in a variety of school systems that the normal, healthy personality is confronted with some of the following developmental problems or tasks:

1) Learning to value self and to develop a feeling of adequacy.

2) Learning to belong and develop a mutuality with others.

3) Learning to manage aggression, frustration.

4) Learning to become reasonably and responsibly independent.

5) Learning an appropriate giving-receiving pattern, developing social interest and a willingness to give more than one receives.

6) Learning to be emotionally flexible.

7) Learning to make value judgments.

8) Learning to get along with peers.

9) Learning to choose, decide and stand behind one's decision.

10) Learning to develop the capacity to relate to changing social groups and develop a feeling of belonging.

11) Learning appropriate sexual roles, to be a boy or a girl.

These tasks provide some of the material for the group discussion. However, the tasks are approached as the children indicate their readiness for the topic.

Goals of Developmental Group Counseling

The purpose of this counseling is much more than crisis-manipulation, repair, or remediation. It is not the purpose of counselor education to develop ambulance drivers, referral specialists, or psychiatrists. Instead, it is vital to recognize that counseling must have some ultimate purposes. I think the objectives of counseling can be spelled out whether in a group or individually in terms of helping the members of the group to:

1) Know and understand themselves.

2) Develop self-acceptance and a feeling of personal worth.

3) Develop methods of solving the developmental tasks of life.

4) Develop increased self direction, problem-solving and decision-making abilities.

5) Develop sensitivity to needs of others, resulting in social interest and the desire to cooperate with others and mature in human relations.

It is apparent that the current needs of our nation both at home and abroad is to help people learn how to live more effectively with each other. In this form of counseling our ultimate counseling goal might well be in line with that already proposed by Byrne (1963b): "The counselor's goal, firmly based on the human worth of the individaul, regardless of education, intelligence, color, or background, is to use his technical skills (a) to help each counselee attain and maintain an awareness of self so that he can be responsible for himself, (b) to help each counselee confront threats to his being, and thus to open further the way for the counselee to increase his concern for other's well-being, (c) to help each counselee bring into full operation his unique potential in compatibility with his own life style and within the ethical limits of society."

Assumptions and Rationale

This approach would accept that behavior patterns in children are not necessarily final and definitive, but may well be a stage through which the individual is moving. It recognizes that the child needs some assistance in managing the way in which he copes with developmental tasks. The child can use help in understanding why he perceives life as he does. The developmental group provides an opportunity for exploration and examination. It provides a reality situation in which the child has the opportunity to learn appropriate patterns of coping and mastering certain kinds of tasks in order to develop as effective social beings.

The rationale for group process stems from a recognition that most problems are primarily social or interpersonal. Each human must learn to interact effectively in group situations.

The counselor can best understand the child's character through observing his social movement and interaction with the peers. It is within the group that the child can benefit from corrective influences and encouragement of the group. The process really provides an opportunity to consider alternative ways of reacting and at the same time receive immediate feedback while testing reality.

The group is unique in another sense in that it meets certain altruistic needs. It is in the group that he has the chance to give affection, provide love, and understanding. It is one of the unique opportunities that the child has to learn to give as well as take.

The group also helps the child be accepted as he is. There is no special prerequisite for membership in this group. Within the safety of the socially accepting group, the child is afforded the opportunity of approaching problems at this own speed.

Group Mechanisms

Group mechanisms are dynamic processes that occur within a group with therapeutic purposes. It is vital that the group counselor be aware of some of the potentialites that exist within a group setting. Briefly, group counseling provides some of the following mechanisms which can bring about emotional personal-social growth:

1) The child has the opportunity to be accepted as a person of value just as he is.
2) The group usually evokes the kind of cooperation and mutual help that is not present in a competitive classroom.

It is in the group that individuals may learn how to help each other and how to give support. Often as a group member reflects on a similar problem his solution may spark another child to reconsider his own perceptions and attitudes.

3) Universalization is a strong factor insofar as the individual realizes that he is not unique and that others have the same problems. Universalization helps to develop chesiveness.

4) The group also provides a unique opportunity to learn by becoming open to new experiences. The silent member can gain as well as those who are more active verbally.

5) The group provides the opportunity for testing our actions within a group that is safe and acceptable.

These mechanisms when utilized appropriately by the group counselor enable members of the group to experience maximum personal and social development.

Organization of Developmental Groups

It is recommended that the counselor go to the classroom to introduce himself and explain his role in the school. In inititating the program he would conduct a group guidance session for the whole class based on the topic "Understanding Ourselves and Others". In this discussion group process is presented as one method of developing such an understanding. In some instances, he might ask for volunteers and demonstrate briefly a group session in the classroom. He could indicate to the children that if they are interested in joining a group they could give him their names at that time or on other visits to the classroom. Experience indicates that more than enough volunteers are usually obtained by this method.

Certainly the development of group work requries attention to administrative considerations. Members of the group should be selected because they are ready to participate in a group experience. In some instances this will indicate that they have a problem or a concern or something they are willing to talk about. They should also be motivated and willing to help each other. The counselor, then, develops groups that he believes will have a therapeutic effect upon each other. This can be done in consultation with the teacher and by individual interviews with the children. A group member should not only be one who will benefit from the counseling, but one who will be able

to contribute to the development of other members of the group. Optimum group size for effective elementary school counseling should probably not exceed five or six children (Mayer and Baker, 1967).

Summary

The purpose of this paper has not been to describe in detail technique or procedure, but to encourage elementary counselors to consider a procedure which may enable them to reach greater numbers of children in far more effective manners than ever before. There is literature related to group counseling in the elementary school which seems to show real promise in terms of affecting changes in the bahvior of elementary school children (Biasco, 1965; Munger, Winkler, Teigland, Kranzler, 1964; Stormer, 1967; Marx, Redding, Smith, 1967). These are only a few of the indications that group work can be an effective procedure in the elementary school.

The real promise of group counseling is that it provides a unique methodology and a unique opportunity for social learning. Certainly, each elementary counselor will want to become well acquainted with this procedure which has the potential of assisting him to reach children in a manner not available through other guidance procedures.

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